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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Bach and his sons

Schloss Ambras, 30.08.2026 [ENA]

Some concert titles promise more than they deliver. "Bach & Söhne", at the Spanischer Saal of Schloss Ambras, is not one of them. In the finest late-Renaissance banquet hall north of the Alps — a room whose gilded coffered ceiling and full-length portrait gallery still feel like a still-living court — the Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin gathers with the Italian harpsichordist Francesco Corti for the family reunion.

It is Akamus's first joint programme with Corti, and by the look of the guest list, one of the flagship chamber events of the 50th anniversary edition. The premise is at once obvious and rarely honoured: to place Johann Sebastian's epoch-making harpsichord concertos next to the very different music his sons wrote as they walked out of his shadow, and to do it not as a pedagogical exercise but as a single evening of sustained musical thought. Corti is, arguably, the harpsichordist alive best equipped to lead this argument. His complete Bach concertos with il Pomo d'Oro on Pentatone reset the interpretive bar.

His 2025 release The Age of Extremes — devoted to Wilhelm Friedemann, Georg Benda and Carl Philipp Emanuel — proved that he also hears the sons on their own terms, not merely as descendants. At the top of the family tree, Johann Sebastian himself supplies the room's centre of gravity. The A-major concerto BWV 1055 or its F-minor counterpart BWV 1056 — both cornerstones of Corti's Pomo d'Oro cycle — will sound, in the Spanish Hall's warm but well-defined acoustic, exactly as Bach would have imagined them at a Zimmermann coffee-house evening: intimate, driving, wittily conversational.

The choice of oboist Xenia Löffler, Akamus's long-serving principal, opens the door to the F-major reconstruction BWV 1053 as an oboe concerto and to the extraordinary double-solo dialogue for oboe and harpsichord that Bach seems to have imagined more than once. Wilhelm Friedemann's Harpsichord Concerto in F minor, a work of unruly, sharply etched Empfindsamkeit whose "Allegro di molto" and "Prestissimo" outer movements grip like little else in his output, is the evening's ideological centre — the moment where the father's counterpoint is set on edge by a son too proud to smooth it out.

Around him, Carl Philipp Emanuel's Berlin-Hamburg concertos will show how the empfindsamer Stil learned to combine tenderness and sudden extraversion in a single phrase, while Johann Christian's galant Italianate manner and the little-known symphonic style of Johann Christoph Friedrich, the "Bückeburg Bach", complete the family portrait. A concerto or overture by Carl Heinrich Graun, Emanuel's Berlin

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colleague at Frederick the Great's court, functions as the courtly mirror in which the whole dynasty is caught mid-transition.

The Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin — Germany's most experienced conductor-less baroque band, forty-four years on from its founding in East Berlin — brings to this repertoire what only long, quarrelsome collegial life can produce: a bass line that argues with itself, tuttis that swing rather than march, and an empfindsam piano that means something. With Corti's fingertip rhetoric on the harpsichord and Löffler's speaking oboe in the tenor voice, the ingredients for a memorable evening are all in place. If the Innsbruck jubilee has one masterclass in listening to the eighteenth century as an ongoing family conversation, it is this one.

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